

## **JUDICIAL BRANCH MAINE JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN TASK FORCE**

<b>Type:</b>	<b>Standing Committee</b>
<b>Established:</b>	<b>November 2, 2006</b>
<b>Revised:</b>	<b>January 6, 2020</b>
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Chief Justice Leigh I. Saufley</b>
<b>Report date:</b>	<b>Annually on January 15</b>
<b>Reports to:</b>	<b>Supreme Judicial Court</b>

### **I. Purpose**

The Maine Justice for Children Task Force (“the Task Force”) is hereby continued as a collaborative, multidisciplinary Task Force to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the State of Maine child welfare system. It is anticipated that the work of the Task Force will regularly occur in conjunction and collaboration with the work of the Executive and Legislative Branches, along with appropriate child welfare entities. This collaboration may include joint meetings designed to maximize the experience of the membership of each committee, prevent redundancy, and be respectful of members’ work schedules.

Because the Task Force will involve members of all three Branches of Government, along with advocates for children, parents, foster parents, and other involved individuals, all work of the Task Force must be undertaken in a manner that fully respects the separation of powers, that assures that no active case information is presented, and that respects all input.

The Task Force will:

- A. Identify strengths that contribute to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- B. Identify systemic barriers which may have a negative effect on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- C. Prioritize issues and develop joint solutions to remove identified barriers;
- D. Identify the training needs of stakeholders in child protective proceedings;

- E. Adopt a training curriculum for stakeholders in child protective proceedings;
- F. Monitor implementation of the Court Improvement Programs (CIPs);
- G. Encourage widespread participation in Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs);
- H. Sponsor regular local meetings involving all stakeholders that will provide training, foster collaboration at the local level, and identify issues that have statewide implications;
- I. Establish other goals for the Task Force, establish timelines for steps toward each goal, and monitor and evaluate progress toward the established goals;
- J. Address other topics, identified by the Task Force, that affect the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- K. Provide input and feedback regarding statewide performance standards for the timely resolution of matters involving children and families in the child welfare system; and
- L. Develop, establish, and operate programs designed to improve the assessment and investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect cases, including cases of suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child and the child's family.

## **II. Authority**

The Task Force shall seek input, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals and groups within and outside Maine state government. The Task Force is authorized to study policies and procedures considered by, or in effect in, other states and any other model policies or procedures. The Task Force may propose recommendations generally or may propose rules, rule amendments, statutes, orders, or policies.

There is no funding authorized for the work of the Task Force.

## **III. Standing Subgroups**

The Task Force will receive input from the following groups, which shall meet separately:

- A. Continuing Education Subcommittee (CES), chaired by the Chief Judge of the District Court or a designee, to plan and execute statewide conferences for stakeholders in child protective matters in compliance with the Court Improvement Program grant requirements. This subcommittee will report to the full Task Force for reporting to the Supreme Judicial Court.
- B. Protective Services Subcommittee. The Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP) co-chaired by the Associate Director of Child Welfare Services and designated community member, to evaluate and strengthen Maine's child protective services system, with the goals of recognizing child abuse or neglect at the first warning signs and handling such cases with minimal additional trauma to the child victim(s) in compliance with the Children's Justice Act grant requirements. This subcommittee will report to the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Chair may, in the Chair's discretion, establish additional subgroups to study designated issues and make recommendations for consideration by the Task Force as a whole. Subgroups and workgroups may consult with experts on an ad hoc basis in furtherance of the completion of their assigned tasks.

At times, subgroups may be formed by excluding certain subsets of the membership to avoid any appearance that any branch of government is intruding upon the powers or responsibilities vested in another, and to assure that the judges on the Task Force can participate within ethical guidelines, particularly in avoiding discussions of pending litigation.

#### **IV. Membership**

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court will serve as the Chair.

The membership of this Task Force shall include:

- Child advocates, which may include attorneys for children, Guardians ad Litem, or Court Appointed Special Advocates;
- Parents or their advocates, which may include representatives of parents' groups or parents' lawyers or advocates;
- Judges and attorneys involved in both civil and criminal court proceedings related to child abuse and neglect (including

individuals involved with the defense as well as the prosecution of such cases);

- Individuals representing the law enforcement community;
- Health and mental health professionals;
- Individuals representing child protective service agencies;
- Individuals experienced in working with children with disabilities;
- Tribal Representatives;
- Adults who were victims of child abuse or neglect;
- Individuals experienced in working with homeless children and youth; and
- Other members appointed by the Chief Justice in her discretion.

A detailed membership roster will be attached to this charter and amended by the Chief Justice as needed.

## **V. Meetings**

The Task Force shall meet as often as is necessary to complete its responsibilities, but at least four times each year. The Chair shall, in consultation with the members, schedule the meetings of the Task Force.

## **VI. Reporting**

The Task Force shall issue a report to be presented to the Supreme Judicial Court annually on January 15 or as otherwise requested.

## **VII. Task Force Duration**

The Maine Justice for Children Task Force will be a Standing Committee of the Judicial Branch.

Dated: January 6, 2020

Approved by:

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Leigh I. Saufley  
Chief Justice